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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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Prepared for the Wisconsin Department  
of Children and Families (DCF)

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#### Why this study was prepared

DCF is interested in evaluating “SOSI” cases—families that are screened out of Child Protective Services, but subsequently screened back in. SOSI implies potentially preventable maltreatment, and DCF would like to better understand and target these families for earlier interventions.

#### Recommendations

The authors recommend that DCF take steps to better track SOSI families through improved data collection and management. They further recommend that DCF consider the wider implementation of community response, early intervention programs for screened-out families, and investigate the implementation of a centralized call center for reports of maltreatment.

A copy of the full report is available online at <http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/research-public-service/publications/child-welfare-screening-in-wisconsin-an-analysis-of-families-screened-out-of-child-protective-services-and-subsequently-screened-in>

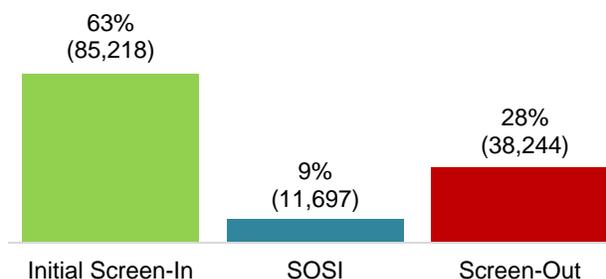
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## Child Welfare Screening in Wisconsin: An Analysis of Families Screened Out of Child Protective Services and Subsequently Screened In

More than 20,000 cases of child abuse and neglect are substantiated each year in Wisconsin. Apart from the obvious harms to the victims, these cases of maltreatment have enormous economic and social consequences. Families screened out of Child Protective Services (CPS) and subsequently screened in, called “SOSI” (screened out, screened in) in this report, make up 9% of families reported to CPS each year.

Proportion of Families Reported to CPS,  
2008-2010, by Screening Decision



SOSI families likely would have benefitted from earlier contact with services. While CPS staff likely did not make mistakes in the screening process, these families may be experiencing deterioration in their home environments, leading to a later report that qualifies as abuse. Because of the initial contact with CPS, these maltreatment cases may have been preventable with an earlier intervention. A number of factors make families more likely to be SOSI, including an allegation of physical or emotional abuse, having a young child in the household, or having a child with a documented disability.

To better understand and address the SOSI problem, the authors recommend that DCF:

- Initiate and maintain a flag within eWiSACWIS to better track SOSI families over time; utilize this tracking system to produce an annual report on SOSI families that will be issued to the counties
- Consider the expansion of community response programs, aimed at providing families who are screened out of CPS with access to a variety of support services
- Implement a cost-benefit analysis of the establishment of a centralized call system to receive maltreatment reports to limit variation by county in screening

Little analysis has been performed on the factors that make a family more likely to be SOSI. While this data only provided a cross-sectional view, the report contributes to child welfare literature that aims to better predict and prevent the incidence of child maltreatment. This report will serve to promote further research on early interventions in the improvement of child welfare and safety nationwide.